



Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) Grant Guidelines and FAQ

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About the WHIP Program

Fish, Wildlife and Parks' (FWP) Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) is a federal grant program for conducting noxious weed management to restore wildlife habitat. WHIP projects should include: ecologically important wildlife habitat that is directly threatened by noxious weed invasion; a landscape or watershed-scale approach; multiple partners and landownerships; access for public hunting; and a plan to maintain or restore native plant communities following weed management activities. Up to \$2M of federal Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration funds are available annually for new WHIP projects and requires a dollar of nonfederal matching funds (cash) for every 3 dollars of federal grant funding. Grants, which are paid in the form of reimbursed expenses, may be up to five years in duration. Eligible activities include herbicide, biocontrol, and mechanical treatments, restoration seedings, grazing improvements as part of an integrated noxious weed management plan, and project administration and vegetation monitoring. All WHIP program requirements and eligible expenditures are defined in the Kelly Flynn Montana Wildlife Habitat Improvement Act ([MCA 87-5-800](#)) and FWP administrative rules ([ARM 12.9.16](#)).

How to Apply for a WHIP Grant

Application Submission

Entities interested in receiving a WHIP grant for a noxious weed management project must complete and submit a grant application. All applications will go through a competitive review, ranking, and approval process with the WHIP Advisory Council, an 18-member group including representatives of the Montana Weed Control Association; county weed districts; commercial herbicide applicators; researchers; outdoor recreation; farming, ranching, and timber industries; tribes; and state and federal agencies. FWP completes the final review and determination of funding.

Application forms must be submitted electronically via the Montana Grants and Loans (WebGrants) website – <https://funding.mt.gov>. Applicants new to WebGrants will need to register with WebGrants and choose Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks as your agency of interest for grant programs.

Grant Deadline

See the [WHIP website](#) for the current year's funding opportunity deadline. The grant application period generally runs from early September – late November each year.

Questions about Applying for a WHIP Grant

WHIP applications are detailed and complex. FWP strongly encourages contacting the WHIP Coordinator, Smith Wells, at 406-444-7291 or smith.wells@mt.gov for questions and guidance with your project design to ensure compliance with the program requirements.

WHIP Grant Requirements

WHIP Project Requirements

To qualify for a grant, a WHIP project must:

- enhance ecologically important wildlife habitats through the management of noxious weeds that directly threaten habitat functions;
- have a reasonable probability of treatment effectiveness through appropriate planning and methodology, anticipated native plant community recovery, preservation of non-target plant species, and post-treatment management;
- use a landscape or watershed-scale approach;
- include a minimum 25% non-federal cash match; and
- report on *measurable objectives* and vegetation monitoring to allow the department to analyze how noxious weed management is enhancing land as wildlife habitat.

In addition to the eligibility requirements, the proposal ranking process will consider projects that:

- include funding commitments from multiple partners;
- involve effective collaboration across multiple land ownerships (public and private); and
- include access for public hunting.

See the [WHIP Grant Application Scoring section](#) for the full list of application scoring criteria.

Vegetation Monitoring

All WHIP projects are required to monitor a representative portion of the noxious weed treatments to help determine if management objectives are being met. Grantees are required to use the WHIP monitoring protocol to collect repeatable quantitative and qualitative vegetation data for pre- and post-treatment conditions.

Monitoring requirements by treatment type are as follows:

- Herbicide and cultural treatments – treatment year (pre-treatment) + 3 consecutive years post-treatment
- Biocontrol treatments – treatment year (pre-treatment) + years 3 and 5 post-treatment
- Prescribed grazing projects – before implementation of the grazing plan (pre-treatment) + years 3, 5, and 10 of the grazing plan.

Eligible Expenditures

Grant dollar and non-federal cash match eligible expenditures:

- Herbicides and additives (supplies and application services)
- Biological control agents (supplies)
- Reseeding (supplies and application services)
- Mechanical weed control
- Grazing improvements – permanent fencing (materials and installation)
- Grant administration, vegetation monitoring, and related administrative costs – up to 10% of total project amount

Non-federal cash match eligible expenditures:

- Grazing improvements – additional infrastructure such as stock water tanks, underground water pipelines for stock tanks, and spring developments or wells for livestock (materials and installation)

Grant funds can only be expended by reimbursement (see the [Grant Award and Implementation section](#) for more information).

All grant applications require signed letters of commitment from each participant contributing non-federal cash match. Each dollar of matching cash can leverage three dollars of grant funds (25%:75%).

Required Application Attachments

1. Maps
 - a. One or multiple maps that show:
 - i. the WHIP project area,
 - ii. proximity to recognizable towns, cities, or landmarks,
 - iii. priority wildlife habitat areas,
 - iv. landowner type of all participating lands (all maps should include public/private ownership using standard colors),
 - v. private property boundaries of all participating lands, labeled with landowner name and type of hunting access or a corresponding legend/table with boundary colors, landowner names, and type of hunting access, and
 - vi. general location of infestations of state or county listed noxious weeds,
 - vii. treatment areas that would be funded both with WHIP grant and cash match funding and the types of weed treatments within these areas (herbicide-aerial; herbicide-ground/spot spraying; biocontrol-insect type; reseeding; and prescribed grazing),
 - viii. approximate locations of monitoring transects.
 - b. Each map should have a legend, north arrow, scale indicator, and credits.
2. Contribution Statements
 - a. Each landowner that is contributing to the grant's cash match (non-federal) must sign a WHIP Partner Contribution Statement. One document with all statements is preferred.
3. Letters of Support
 - a. Letters of support are optional but can make a compelling case for funding, including letters from 1) the local FWP wildlife biologist, 2) any participating WHIP partners, or 3) other pertinent parties.
4. Grazing Plan
 - a. If prescribed grazing is proposed as a treatment in the WHIP application, please see further information in the [Prescribed Grazing Treatment Requirements section](#).

Additional Information on WHIP Grants

- WHIP recommends working with the local county weed district coordinator to select herbicides appropriate for the site and type of noxious weeds to be controlled. They can also help calculate the cost of weed treatments to accomplish your treatment goals and objective.
- Projects should focus on the underlying ecological causes of the noxious weed invasions and increase the competitiveness of desirable native plant communities.
- The grant project area needs to be at landscape scale, such as a watershed or ecologically based unit, and should involve multiple landowner types within that area (private, state, federal, etc.).

- Grant and cash match (non-federal) funds must be expended on treatment areas that are within *priority wildlife habitats*.
 - Grant applicants should work with their local agency wildlife biologists, including the FWP biologist, to help determine if the proposal involves *priority habitat* for one or more *priority wildlife species* that is directly threatened by noxious weed infestations. Priority wildlife species are defined as wild birds or mammals that are either species of conservation concern or game species that are recognized by the State of Montana for their ecological, economic, or recreational values. Priority habitat examples include but are not limited to key elk and deer seasonal ranges, bighorn sheep seasonal ranges, prairie habitat for grassland bird species of concern, sage-grouse core habitat, native habitats for upland game birds, and pronghorn seasonal range and migration corridors.
 - Make sure to include the collaborative work with FWP in the narrative section of the application. Applicants should also include a letter of support by the local FWP wildlife biologist, as some Advisory Council members look specifically for this letter.
- Grant applicants need to contact each landowner within the WHIP project area to determine type of hunting access and hunter days for that landowner. The amount of accessibility for public hunting within the project area is an important criterion for ranking WHIP applications.
- A WHIP grant period typically starts July 1st and ends on June 30th of the last year of the grant project. Only cash match is available to expend July 1st. Grant dollars are available for reimbursement only after agreements are signed, which may take up to two months after grant approval. Plan your noxious weed treatment schedule accordingly.

WHIP Grant Application Scoring

Applications that are complete and meet basic requirements will be scored using the criteria below.

	Points	Criteria
1	0 – 20	Proposal involves a noxious weed threat with compelling information on how the infestation directly diminishes the effectiveness of a priority habitat to support one or more priority wildlife species.
2	0 – 20	Proposal would significantly reduce or resolve noxious weed threat and support habitat effectiveness over a sizable portion of priority habitat and associated watersheds. Applications that do not include a minimum acreage of priority habitat to benefit from grant funding will receive zero points.
3	0 – 10	Project would help implement an established weed management strategy, is technically feasible, and would maintain or restore native vegetation.
4	0 – 10	Management of project area addresses the primary spread of noxious weeds to native wildlife habitats (up to 5 pts) while also providing for native plant community health to reduce susceptibility to weed invasion (up to 5 pts).
5	0 – 10	Project involves funding commitments from multiple partners (up to 5 pts) and leverages additional funding or in-kind contribution beyond the minimum requirement (up to 5 pts).
6	0 – 15	Project demonstrates an effective collaboration across multiple land ownerships. Cooperative Weed Management Areas, as defined in the Montana State Weed Management Plan, would receive the highest points.

7	0 – 15	Project area provides access for public hunting.
8	0 – 10	Monitoring plan meets or exceeds minimum requirements as detailed under the Monitoring Plan section of the WHIP Application – narrative description.
9	0 – 10	The grant application, including proposal information, funding and monitoring plans is clear, well organized, and reflects a high likelihood of success for all aspects of the proposed project.
	120	Total points available.

Prescribed Grazing Treatment Requirements

The WHIP program can be used for grazing system improvements where livestock grazing has caused a decline in native plant communities and facilitated weed infestations. The WHIP participating landowner will need to design a *prescribed grazing* plan as part of this treatment option. Prescribed grazing treatments **cannot** be a standalone weed control option. Grazing improvements must be part of an integrated weed control plan with herbicide, biological control, and/or reseeding treatments for a holistic approach to reducing weed infestations while improving the overall integrity of native plant communities.

Grazing plan required components:

- A description of the current livestock grazing management.
- Well defined short-term objectives that can be measured at the end of the grant period (up to 5 years). Such as, percent reduction in weed infestations, percent change in plant community composition, and before-and-after adjusted grazing patterns based on applied principles of range management.
- An initial assessment of the ecological conditions including the general plant composition, ground cover, or other prominent grazing-related issues that have facilitated noxious weed infestation.
- A description of how, by implementing the prescribed grazing plan, the conditions of the pastures are expected to improve over time and how that is expected to reduce future noxious weed issues.
- A 10-year grazing rotation schedule specific to each affected pasture, the class of livestock, and other information pertinent to the management of livestock.
- A schedule for completing all fence installation and other approved grazing infrastructure/improvement within the **first two years** of the grant period. This should allow enough time to document results of implementing the new grazing plan and determine if the (short-term) grant period objectives were met.
- A map of proposed pastures corresponding to the grazing schedule along with identified infrastructure improvements.
- Start designing a prescribed grazing plan by identifying pasture type: native plant communities, riparian, non-native pasture, or irrigated pasture. The type of pasture will help determine grazing timing (spring/summer/fall), length, and intensity.

Eligible grant dollar and non-federal cash match expenditures include permanent, [wildlife-friendly](#) fencing and contracted installation costs (metal t-posts, wooden driver posts, barbed wire, electric wire for permanent electric fence, etc.). Additional non-federal cash match expenditures include stock water tanks, underground water pipelines for stock tanks, and spring developments or wells for livestock, and contracted installation costs.

Note that ground disturbing activities may require an archeological review. Any type of equipment that is transferable for other uses, such as solar panels, pumps, generators, trailers cannot be purchased with program funds nor considered as cash match.

Additional information on prescribed grazing treatments:

- WHIP projects with grazing treatments require following grazing plans for a full 10 years after grazing improvements have been implemented. To accommodate the 1-2 years needed for installing improvements prior to starting the grazing rotation, these agreements may run up to 12 years in length.
- Private landowners that choose to implement a grazing improvement treatment using a prescribed grazing plan will have an abstract of notice recorded in the county where the grazing improvement property is located. All recording fees will be assumed by FWP.
- Applications involving prescribed grazing need to include information on how weed infestations have been impacted by livestock grazing issues and how the grazing infrastructure along with the prescribed grazing plan will help invigorate and re-establish native plants, suppress noxious weeds or other invasive plants, improve rangeland health, and restore wildlife habitat.
- A performance report on deliverables is required at the end of the grant period. And after the 10th year of the grazing rotation, a final report on monitoring results is required for closing the WHIP project.
- Annual reporting on compliance with the grazing plan is required. This is in addition to vegetation monitoring reports.

Grant Approval Process

After grant applications have been submitted, they are reviewed for completeness by FWP staff and then scored by the WHIP Advisory Council in December. Incomplete applications may not be considered for funding. FWP will hold grant hearings with the WHIP Advisory Council in January to review each complete grant application. Grant applicants are required to present their proposed project to the Council. The Advisory Council makes funding recommendations to FWP.

Grant proposals only from counties that meet [MCA 87-5-806\(2\)](#) requirements are eligible for funding from WHIP. Project sponsors also must have a current SAM Unique Entity ID or obtain one before the WHIP project can be awarded.

NOTE: WHIP project treatments are considered routine maintenance actions with a low probability of negative environmental impacts, so an Environmental Assessment (EA) through MEPA is not required.

Grant Award and Implementation

Grant awardees will be required to:

1. sign a sub-recipient agreement (up to 5 years) with FWP that is subject to administrative requirements of the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act (Title 50 CFR 80-20-160),
2. sign a program agreement with FWP for project monitoring requirements (3 to 5 years post treatment, or up to 12 years for grazing treatments), and
3. submit semi-annual progress and annual performance reports, scheduled vegetation monitoring documentation, and a final accomplishment report.

Projects may not start expending cash match until FWP receives a notice of grant approval from the USFWS, which is generally around July 1. WHIP grant dollars will not be available to spend (and be reimbursed) until both WHIP agreements are signed by the project sponsor and FWP, which can take up to two months after grant approval from the USFWS.

Reimbursement Payments

Project sponsors need to submit a reimbursement claim and expenditure documentation regularly through WebGrants. Reimbursement claims will be approved based on actual expenditure receipts for the completion of planned project weed treatments. Receipts or vendor invoices with proof of payment will serve as documentation that bills have been paid, which is a requirement of Pittman-Robertson funds, prior to reimbursement from FWP. For personnel or administrative expenditure documentation, project sponsors must include sufficient records of personnel salaries and wages that accurately reflect the work performed using grant dollars. This is achieved through the grantee's internal timekeeping and payroll system.

Project sponsors need to ensure they have a minimum of 25% cash match prior to requesting grant funds for a reimbursement payment. Approved cash match can be accumulated in the first part of the grant period and then all grant funds can be expended during the remainder of the grant period. Or FWP can reimburse 75% of approved expenditures, leaving the remaining cost as match.

WHIP Terminology

Measurable objective – an anticipated response in vegetation that will be measured to evaluate the effectiveness of a noxious weed treatment to restore, rehabilitate, improve, or manage land as wildlife habitat.

Prescribed grazing – the application of domestic livestock grazing at a specified season and intensity to accomplish specific vegetation management goals, consistent with WHIP program goals of reducing noxious weeds and restoring priority wildlife habitat.

Priority habitat – plant communities or settings that provide a unique, high value habitat, important to one or more priority wildlife species.

Priority wildlife species – wild birds or mammals that are either species of conservation concern or game species that are recognized by the State of Montana for their ecological, economic, or recreational values.

Project area – land comprising treatments and the area where benefits are anticipated, such as a watershed, ecological unit, or other defined area.

Project sponsor – the local, state, or national organization, either public or private, administering a project.

Treatment areas – specific sites where noxious weed management treatments occur.

Weed management strategy – a planning document that provides direction for identifying, prioritizing, and treating noxious weeds.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Refer to the Kelly Flynn Montana Wildlife Habitat Improvement Act ([MCA 87-5-800](#)) and FWP administrative rules ([ARM 12.9.16](#)) for all program rules and requirements.

If you have further questions, please contact the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program Coordinator at 406-444-7291 or smith.wells@mt.gov.

QUESTION: How is non-federal match defined for WHIP?

ANSWER: For the purposes of WHIP, non-federal match is limited to qualifying expenditures made with non-federal dollars during the grant period. See the [Eligible Expenditures section](#) for a list of qualifying expenditures.

QUESTION: How are non-federal match expenditures documented?

ANSWER: A copy of a paid invoiced receipt must be submitted as a claim through the grant management system to document cash match expenditures.

QUESTION: How does FWP distribute grant funds?

ANSWER: All grant funds will be requested by and paid directly to the Project Sponsor. FWP will make payments upon receipt of a claim through the grant management system that has proper documentation, including a statement of work completed, source of non-federal match, and associated copies of paid invoice receipts.

QUESTION: Can overhead be charged in the WHIP grant budget for grant administration?

ANSWER: As of July 1, 2023, up to 10% of the total project amount can be used for grant administration, vegetation monitoring, and related administrative costs. Administrative grant dollars will be available as a flat rate payment added to reimbursements to cover project-related administrative costs. WHIP projects cannot count administrative activities as cash match.

If projects include up to 10% administrative costs, they will need to cash match (25%) those admin costs with project work. Example: Project work (such as weed spraying) = \$100,000 (\$75,000 grant + \$25,000 cash match); 10% Admin costs = \$10,000; Additional cash match = \$3,333 will need to be derived from additional project work match. Total project = \$113,333 (\$85,000 grant + 28,333 cash match).

QUESTION: What are some options for how cash match (non-federal) can be used to leverage grant funds?

ANSWER: There are a few ways of configuring cash match (non-federal) to leverage grant funds. Eligible expenditures within treatment areas may serve as cash match (non-federal), be funded with grant funds, or a combination of both. We provide the following scenarios to help explain this further. Note that in all scenarios, the cash match must be spent either before the federal funds or coincident with

federal funds at a rate of 25% match and 75% federal. Federal dollars cannot be spent before the cash match (non-federal) dollars, but the cash match (non-federal) dollars may be spent before the federal dollars.

Scenario 1: The most common manner for providing match is to complete an eligible treatment using non-federal funds for materials or services and submit paid receipts to FWP. FWP would then provide reimbursement to the project sponsor for 75% of the documented costs. The remaining 25% would go towards non-federal cash match expenditures.

Scenario 2: Landowner A completes an eligible treatment using non-federal funding within one of the treatment areas. Landowner A may have paid for the treatment entirely out-of-pocket or may have used other non-federal sources and therefore all the expenditures may be claimed as non-federal match. Landowner B, who also has land within a treatment area, may ask for reimbursement for eligible treatment(s) of up to 3 dollars of federal WHIP funds for every dollar spent by Landowner A.

NOTE: The intended match configuration must be described in the WHIP Project Funding Plan section of the WHIP application. Also, grant cash match (non-federal) expenditures must be confirmed before federal funds can be distributed.

QUESTION: Does contributing partners mean the landowners that will be benefitting from this grant or specifically the entity who will be administering the grant? In other grant programs a CWMA (Coordinated Weed Management Area) is selected and left open to all landowners in that area to participate if they are interested, but we don't usually require any landowner confirmation prior to applying for a grant.

ANSWER: A contributing partner is any entity that intends to provide a cash match (non-federal) toward the grant project. It is important that grant expenditures be restricted to ecologically important wildlife habitats (where treatment areas are defined), as required by program statute. The grant application format requires each cash match (non-federal) contributing partner to complete a contribution statement that details their contributions to the project. This provides the Advisory Council and FWP with a tangible accounting of grant cash match (non-federal) that is being offered up. This does require knowing in advance the contributing partners and their commitments toward the grant project. As with the following question, it may be that a landowner intends to provide 25% cost share on work conducted on their land, corresponding to an estimated treatment acreage. The actual cash match expended may vary depending on the actual acreage treated. Also, as with Scenario 2 in the previous question, a landowner could participate without contributing match.

QUESTION: How imperative is it that the herbicide application cost summary spreadsheet exactly matches the actual treatments? In my experience landowners oftentimes change their minds on what they treat after they have already agreed to a specific amount.

ANSWER: An awarded grant can only pay up to the total amount committed to in the grant agreement, consistent with what is detailed in the grant application. Also, the actual types of treatments (including types of chemicals, specific biocontrol agents, etc.) cannot vary what is described in the application and the Scope of Work in the grant agreement. However, we recognize the acreages in the cost summary

sheets are estimates and will vary from actual treated acreages. Anticipated treatment acres should be based on best estimates.

QUESTION: Can a landowner apply herbicides as part of a grant?

ANSWER: A landowner's labor and related application expenses are not a reimbursable cost for the grant. Herbicide application costs of a commercial applicator hired by the landowner are reimbursable with paid invoice receipts. Herbicide chemical purchases made by the landowner are also reimbursable with paid invoice receipts.

QUESTION: What about in-kind contributions?

ANSWER: Materials or labor that a partner is providing within the project area that helps accomplish the overall goal of wildlife habitat restoration that is not being used as a cash match contribution is considered an in-kind contribution. These items do not constitute match for federal funding but can be used to describe the overall effectiveness and commitment of the partnership, which would be important for ranking grant applications and awarding funding. These contributions can be documented in the WHIP Project Funding Plan of the WHIP application.

QUESTION: If we are conducting treatment work over multiple years, do we need to show a breakdown by year?

ANSWER: Yes, the detailed treatment forms have a section that requires acres treated per year. This breakdown of treatments by year helps FWP staff and the Advisory Council members better understand the anticipated treatments of the multi-year proposed project.

QUESTION: What factors should I consider when planning a multi-year project?

ANSWER: There are many factors that could limit accomplishments on a multi-year weed management project. Factors include the availability of materials and labor, contractor schedules, staff changes, drought conditions, and unpredictable weather. These potential setbacks should be considered when planning yearly objectives and treatments.

QUESTION: If a project experiences setbacks that lead to less work being accomplished than was planned, can the grant be extended?

ANSWER: The maximum length of a WHIP federal grant is 5 years. If the project grant is already 5 years in duration, it cannot be extended. FWP recommends working collaboratively and creatively with project partners to overcome setbacks and get as much work accomplished as possible during the grant period.

QUESTION: Can we reapply for a WHIP grant?

ANSWER: A project sponsor and partners can reapply for another WHIP grant once their current grant period has ended. Reapplications will follow the standard application submittal, approval, and award process.

Reapplications should build on the objectives and accomplishments of the previous grant such as expanding the project area, focusing treatments in new areas, incorporating additional treatment methods (biocontrol, reseeding), including additional partners, and retreating problem areas.

Grant sponsors will need to continue monitoring treatments from the previous grant, following WHIP Monitoring Protocol.

QUESTION: If WHIP funding is intended specifically for priority wildlife habitat, how do we address non-habitat areas that are integrated within those habitats?

ANSWER: FWP recognizes the value of providing comprehensive weed treatment coverage. While WHIP grant funds are intended to be used on important wildlife habitats, treatments on incidental non-habitats, such as a road corridor or other minor disturbed sites can be included. These sites must, however, be incidental in size when compared to the overall treatment area. WHIP is not intended for targeting roads and other disturbed areas in the vicinity of wildlife habitat. However, partner efforts to manage weeds in these non-habitat areas are useful to include as background information in the grant application to show the overall effectiveness of coordinated partner efforts.

QUESTION: How do I know if my project area includes priority wildlife habitat?

ANSWER: Contact your local agency wildlife biologists, including the FWP biologist, to help determine if the proposal involves priority habitat for one or more priority wildlife species that is directly threatened by noxious weed infestations. Priority wildlife species are defined as wild birds or mammals that are either species of conservation concern or game species that are recognized by the State of Montana for their ecological, economic, or recreational values. Priority habitat examples include but are not limited to key elk and deer seasonal ranges, bighorn sheep seasonal ranges, prairie habitat for grassland bird species of concern, sage-grouse core habitat, native habitats for upland game birds, and pronghorn seasonal range and migration corridors.

Additional Resources

- [Montana Noxious Weed Management Plan](#)
- [Montana Weed Control Association website](#)
- [Wildlife Friendly Fencing Guide](#)
- [Revegetation Guidelines: Considering Invasive and Noxious Weeds](#)